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TAGS: [PREL](#) [EUN](#) [BO](#) [FR](#)
SUBJECT: FRANCE SUPPORTIVE BUT FLEXIBLE ON BELARUS SANCTIONS

REF: A. STATE 112644
[1](#)B. NOV 5 EUR/UMB (WANG)-EUR/WE (MARTIN) EMAIL

Classified By: Political Counselor Andrew Young, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: France supports the EU rolling over both sanctions and their suspension at the November GAERC meeting, but remains flexible as to the exact form of the rollover. Although the GOF does not believe that the Belarusian government has earned the reward of lifted sanctions, the French have their doubts about whether the sanctions are effective - in part due to a lack of discipline among EU members. Consequently, the French are focusing on other measures to anchor Belarus to the West. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) Thibaut Lespagnol, responsible for the Eastern Partnership countries within the French MFA's office of EU Common Foreign and Security Policy, said November 6 that while sanctions do not appear to have had much success in encouraging real reforms by President Lukashenka, France opposes lifting them immediately. Lespagnol acknowledged that there was a risk that if sanctions and their suspension were both rolled over for the same amount of time, they could be allowed to lapse without full consideration of the consequences. However, he suggested that extending the sanctions and the suspension until October 2010 would allow the EU to assess the April 2010 elections while the upcoming 2011 elections would focus the attention of EU member states, who would appreciate the stakes of allowing sanctions to lapse without due consideration.

[1](#)3. (C) However, Lespagnol also said that France would have no objection in principle to staggering the end dates for renewed sanctions and their suspension to avoid allowing them to fade away without discussion. He said that if this were a reasonable compromise between the more stringent Dutch position and anti-sanctions countries, including the Swedish presidency, France could support it. He cautioned that a short rollover of the suspension, however, might encourage fatigue with the issue, and suggested a good timeline could be a renewal of sanctions until October 2010 and a renewal of the suspension until June 2010.

[1](#)4. (C) Acknowledging the importance of avoiding a divergence between the U.S. and EU positions on sanctions, Lespagnol said the real problem was the divergence within the EU between member states that respect the sanctions and those that increasingly ignore them. He cited the visits of Lukashenka to Italy and Italian FM Frattini to Minsk as a depressing gauge of Italian commitment to the EU position, and added that the Netherlands maintains significant business ties to Belarus.

[1](#)5. (C) Lespagnol stressed that France is currently focusing on other measures to anchor Belarus to the West. For example, France supports restarting the ratification process for the Partnership Cooperation Agreement, which would allow the EU to draw up a road map to encourage real reform. He said that the MFA was currently negotiating with reluctant French immigration authorities for visa liberalization for Belarusian citizens, especially students and NGOs, even

beyond what the EU is already set to offer in March 2010. Finally, he said France supported efforts by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development to increase lending activity in Belarus as a means to encourage privatization. On this last point, however, he said the GOF was still watching to see whether this would simply lessen the pressure for Lukashenka to commit to real political reform, a question he also asked regarding increased IMF engagement in Belarus.

RIVKIN